U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Currents

Fiscal Year 2011
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REGION 2 – SOUTHWEST REGION

Fisheries Program Highlights

(October – December 2010)
March 2011

Edited by Jeremy Voeltz, Arizona FWCO

The 2009 American Reinvestment and Recovery Act funded 55 projects for Fisheries Stations in Region 2. Nearly all of these projects are now completed.

Read the complete stories on pages one through three

New Filtration System Nearing Completion at Inks Dam NFH

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Staff inspect the new filtration system at Inks Dam NFH

Inks Dam NFH is installing a new filtration device, motor and pump, and electronic alarm system for the hatcheries water supply using funding provided by the 2009 American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA).

The importance of this project is preventing the spread of non-target species. Previously, Inks Dam NFH drew its water supply directly from Inks Lake, which has numerous species of warm water fishes not targeted for production at the hatchery. The new filter system will prevent these unwanted species from entering the hatchery. In addition, the 50-micron screens will prevent smaller organisms, such as quagga mussel veligers from passing into Inks Dam NFH production waters.

Paul Dorman, Inks Dam NFH

New Greenhouse ARRA Project at San Marcos NFHTC

The San Marcos NFHTC received ARRA funding to build an addition to the greenhouse which is used to hold the endangered Texas wild-rice. The new system should be completed by the end of March.

In addition to longer, wider, and deeper tanks which will allow for a more robust population of Texas wild-rice, the greenhouse will now also provide space to grow other native macrophytes for use in river restoration work in the San Marco River drainage.

Mara Alexander, San Marcos NFHTC

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A new greenhouse at San Marcos NFHTC will help maintain refugia for endangered Texas wild rice

ARRA Projects Completed at Uvalde NFH

The Uvalde NFH awarded approximately $340,000 in ARRA funding for several projects to upgrade, add to, and rehabilitate the facility. The completed projects provide the facility with improved water control, uninterrupted water flows during power failures, additional fish protection against avian predation, more efficient and productive fish containment screens, more accurate water quality/quantity data for the station's effluent discharges, better energy efficiency, and improved staff safety. This funding, while providing jobs to several contractors across the country also fulfilled a long list of maintenance needs that would not have been funded for several years under typical maintenance funding mechanisms.

Grant Webber, Uvalde NFH

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An water quality monitoring station in place at Uvalde NFH

Willow Beach NFH Going "Green" with the help of ARRA

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With over 300 days of sunshine a year, Willow Beach NFH is an ideal place for solar electricity

Willow Beach NFH recently completed several infrastructure improvement projects to help the hatchery reduce energy consumption. These projects, funded through ARRA, including installation of an 8-kilowatt photovoltaic system to power parts of the hatchery; new energy-efficient doors and windows for the hatchery's offices, apartment, and feed rooms; and replacement of old concrete asbestos piping throughout the hatchery living quarters.

Other ARRA-funded projects completed by the hatchery included seismic rehabilitation of several buildings, and re-wiring the electrical components of the razorback sucker rearing unit. Both projects were needed to address potential construction code violations.

Kurt Eversman, Willow Beach NFH

Gila Trout Restoration Funded Through ARRA

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A rotenone drip station deployed on Ash Creek

The Arizona FWCO transferred $139,000 of ARRA funds to the (AGFD) Arizona Game and Fish Department for a multi-phased project to benefit the threatened Gila trout.

Phase one, completed in the fall of 2009, was the stocking of Gila trout into Frye Creek on Mount Graham. Phase two, completed in October 2010 by AGFD, Arizona FWCO, and U.S. Forest Service, was a chemical renovation of seven miles of Ash Creek (also on Mount Graham) to remove hybrid trout. Ash Creek will be stocked with pure Gila trout in the fall of 2011.

The AGFD created two wildlife technician positions using the ARRA funding to complete much of the pre-renovation work.

Jeremy Voeltz, Arizona FWCO

Paddlefish Population Assessments in Oklahoma

The Oklahoma FWCO conducts paddlefish population assessments in three major river drainages throughout the state to evaluate efforts to reestablish the paddlefish in areas where it historically occurred. The focus for the winter sampling season of 2010-2011 was a mark-recapture population estimate at Eufaula Lake on the North and South Canadian River drainage systems to capture paddlefish that had been stocked annually since 2007 by the Tishomingo NFH. Preliminary results indicate that the population is doing very well and is continuing to expand with the efforts of hatcheries and management crews.

Brent Bristow, Oklahoma FWCO

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Biologists process a large paddlefish caught in Eufaula Lake, Oklahoma

4th Largest Pikeminnow Since 1991 Caught in the San Juan

In the fall of 2010, researchers captured a 30.3-inch, 9.1-pound endangered Colorado pikeminnow (estimated to be 10-15 years old) about 16 miles downstream of Shiprock, New Mexico. This was the fourth largest Colorado pikeminnow captured in the San Juan River since 1991. The fish was captured while conducting fish monitoring and nonnative fish management activities as part of efforts to recover native fishes in the San Juan River. The fish was tagged and returned to the river.

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A biologist from the New Mexico FWCO holds a 9+ pound endangered Colorado pikeminnow

"This year's capture was very encouraging because finding a fish of this size and age provides evidence that Colorado pikeminnow are out there and surviving," said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southwest Regional Director, Benjamin Tuggle.

Dave Campbell and Tom Buckley, Region 2 External Affairs

Prescribed Fire Conducted at Tishomingo NFH

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Area fire personnel assist with a controlled burn at Tishomingo NFH

A multi-agency fire team completed a much needed prescribed burn around ponds, levees, and ditches at the Tishomingo NFH. The fire crew from the Wichita Mountains NWR, joined by members of the Tishomingo NWR, Chickasaw National Recreational Area, Reagan Volunteer Fire Department, and hatchery personnel, executed the burn to reduce areas of vegetation and brush that are not easily accessible to mowers which also reduced the property fire hazard. The burn allowed all participants a chance to gain practical experience in fire communication and execution of a controlled burn in a safe and professional manner.

Ralph Simmons, Tishomingo NFH

Turtles Gain Friends FAST at Tishomingo NFH

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Alligator snapping turtle hatchlings at Tishomingo NFH

The Tishomingo NFH has a new friends group, Friends of the Alligator Snapping Turtle (FAST). The group is comprised of biologists from state agencies and academic institutions in support of the alligator snapping turtle program at the hatchery. FAST has already secured $11,000 in funding from the Delta Foundation. The donated funds will be used to purchase an environmental chamber to expand hatchling production, tracking equipment for research and monitoring, and heat pumps for the alligator snapping turtle recirculation system at the hatchery. Through their contacts throughout the nation, FAST plans to continue searching for donations to support the turtle program at the hatchery by improving research and assessment abilities with the goal of reestablishing and managing this species throughout its range.

Mary Davis and Ralph Simmons, Tishomingo NFH

Winter Volunteers Return to Uvalde NFH

Uvalde NFH is very fortunate to have our Winter RV Volunteers return for their second year. Randy and Sharon Nador arrived in November 2010 and have been hard at work since their arrival. Projects that they work on include wiring, plumbing, construction, project design, running errands, caring for Texas wild-rice, feeding fish, assisting with fish tagging, assisting with pond harvesting, taking photos and videos, and collecting water quality data. The amount of money they have saved us in two years is estimated to be ten's of thousands of dollars. They stay with us from November through March and work approximately 650 hours each for the time they are here.

Karin Eldridge, Uvalde NFH

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Randy and Sharon Nador volunteer their winter to assist with projects at Uvalde NFH

Razorback Sucker Tagging Season at Uvalde NFH

October and November were busy months for staff at the Uvalde NFH. In addition to this year's commitment of 12,000 razorback suckers tagged, the hatchery tagged another 4,000 fish to make up for those that could not be stocked the previous spring because of their gravid condition. Of the 2009 year class fish that were tagged, only 303 were culled for being under target size, which is 300-mm in total length. This translates to a 97.5% growth rate to target size (the size at which the fish have a better chance of avoiding predation in the wild).

Because of the increased workload, the Dexter NFHTC sent three staff members for two days of tagging assistance. In addition, several other volunteers assisted Uvalde staff. All tagging was completed and fish were stocked a week ahead of schedule.

Rick Echols, Uvalde NFH

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Razorback suckers are tagged at Uvalde NFH for tracking once they are stocked in the wild.

CONSERVING AMERICA'S Fisheries

Southwest Region Fisheries Division

National Fish Hatcheries

The National Fish Hatcheries (NFH), at Willow Beach, Alchesay-Williams Creek, Uvalde, Tishomingo, and Inks Dam; develop and maintain brood stocks of important fish species, both sport fishes and critically imperiled non-game fishes. The hatcheries are the source of fish and eggs distributed to partners with similar aquatic conservation missions, such as native fish restoration or fulfilling federal mitigation responsibilities. Hatcheries are often called upon to provide a place of refuge for imperiled aquatic organisms, such as aquatic plants and amphibians.

Fish and Wildlife Conservation Offices

The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Offices (FWCO) in Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas evaluate wild native fish stocks and their habitats, and work with partners and other Service programs to restore habitats and fish populations.

These offices provide technical fish and wildlife management assistance to tribes and other partners with a primary focus on native aquatic species.

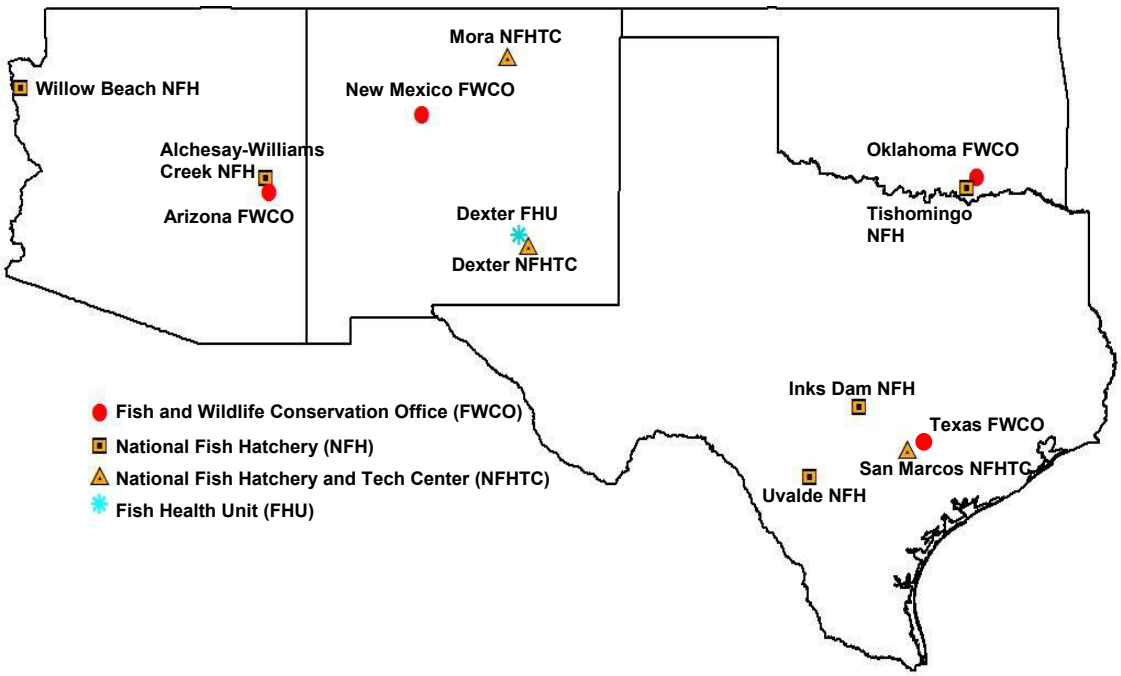
Fish Technology Centers

The Fish Technology Centers (NFHTC), at Dexter, Mora, and San Marcos; develop leading-edge technology for use by tribal, state, and federal fish hatcheries and fishery biologists to make fish culture more productive, cost-effective, and scientifically sound.

Technology improves hatchery efficiency; helps assure the genetic integrity of fishes, at the same time minimizing the effects of hatchery fish on wild fish stocks.

Fish Health Unit at Dexter

The Fish Health Unit (FHU) at Dexter assesses the well-being of fish that live in the wild or are raised at hatcheries. Fish health biologists are highly trained in various scientific disciplines, like immunology, epidemiology, toxicology, and genetics. They apply that knowledge in fish health assessments that might lead to early detection of potentially devastating diseases, prescribing preemptive measures.



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